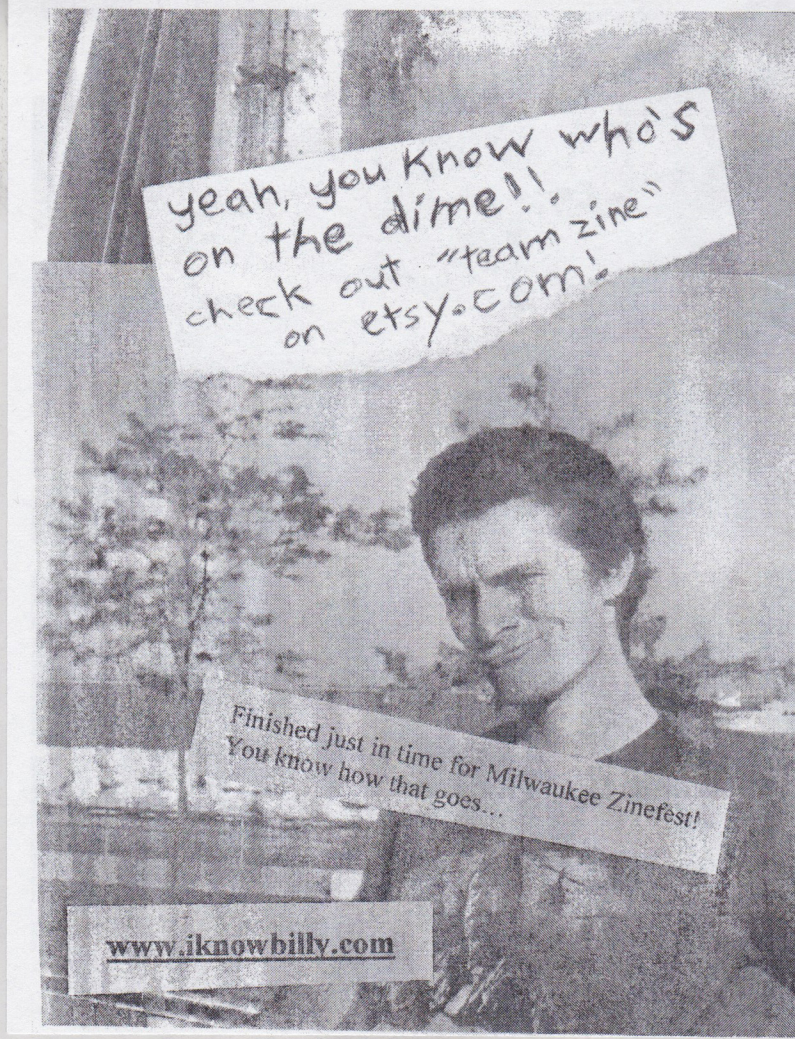


Proof I Exist

Nov. 2009

Issue #10





yeah, you know who's
on the dime!!
check out "team zine"
on etsy.com!

Finished just in time for Milwaukee Zinefest!
You know how that goes...

www.iknowbilly.com



ch. 1

The Vampire Movie

It had been an amazing find. A nugget of gold at the bottom of a dumpster. Right up there in the record books with the summer CT found hundreds of prepaid phone-cards, or that night Dave and I dumpstered an entire shopping cart full of ice cream. Epic. Kelly had found one of the most amazing things ever. EVER. And he gave it to me.

I read through it, cover to cover. It was so good, it made me cry. Tears of joy and hilarity. Kelly Shortandqueer had found a vampire script in a dumpster in Denver. And wow. It was amazing. Twenty-three pages of dialog unlike any I'd seen before. It was strange. It was funny. It was not really that good. I mean, it was bad. But it was great.

It's easy in today's world of hipster jack-assery to be tarnished on the 'so bad it's good' mentality. The kids these days, with their texting and video games, they've soaked themselves in so many levels of irony that it has almost lost all meaning. But maybe that's a good thing. Irony is boring. It took me awhile to realize it. But upon realizing this, I've also realized that the things I once enjoyed because they were "funny" and "ironic", well, in fact, many of those things I just plain like. It was a tough thing to admit, and it came to me through the wonder of Walker, Texas Ranger. I used to hate the show. Years went by, and it came back in reruns. I accidentally watched a couple episodes.

At first you see the terrible acting, horrible plots, and bad, bad editing. Well, I see these things. Film school is a great way to blow thousands of dollars, but in addition to brokenness, you also gain the ability to recognize horrible editing.

Anyway, after a bit I began watching WTR as more of a comedy. The punch line being Walker (aka, CHUCK NORRIS!) is unstoppable. If he's tied up in a desert about to die, he will whistle and his trusty horse will gallop over to untie his wrists. If drug-dealers have rich people hostage, Walker will fly an experimental rocket pack to the roof, sneak down through the ventilation, and spin-kick ever gunman. If his wife, Alex, is in trouble, he will swing on a rope from a moving helicopter, crash through the plate glass window of a 30-story high rise office building, and rescue her (and the mayor). Yes these are real episodes. Yes, Allison has bought me all the DVD box sets.

Anyway, back to the Vampire script. Awesome characters. Awesome dialog. No punctuation at all. Typos and misspellings in every paragraph. This was a script written by someone with great intentions, and a good idea for a plot, but with no knowledge of how to use spell-check. Maybe it was in the dumpster for a reason. Maybe they gave up. But I loved this script. And let me state clearly, for the record, I DO NOT LOVE IT IN AN IRONIC WAY. I am not, in any way, making fun of the script or the person who wrote it, whomever they may be. The person, through all their typos and illogical scene directions, had created an entirely unique style. THAT is what I love. Perfect scripts and Hollywood movies, bla. I like this weird shit, I like lines like "We will feast on the blood of the damned!"

Kelly found this script in like, 2004 or 2005. I read it, loved it, wanted to make it. Was in school at the time, had the resources. Took notes, geared up. Then life got complicated. My dad passed away, and I decided to move. I found a small place to live by myself. Was there for 2 years healing up, then moved in with Allison. I'd forgotten about a lot of things, including the script. Lost a lot of things, including my birth certificate. But, while searching for the lost, I found what I'd forgotten.



My jaw dropped, and I pulled out the vampire script. The title, "Passion for Death! (=Vampires)" had been written in pen on the top by the long lost mysterious author. I reread it, loved it still. I decided to try and make the movie.



I talked it up, found some help, started talking to my friends. It's been a year or so since I made a movie (Search for "Man Bites Doll" on Vimeo.com). I started getting some encouragement. Tyler said he would help. Keith agreed to be the lead vampire. Sky, an absolutely amazing artist, agreed to help out with costume design. Little by little, things fell into place. So what happened? Why no movie?



I hadn't realized it, but this was MY project. I mean, I guess it seems obvious, I just hadn't really thought of it. I had considered it to be OUR project. I'd never directed a script that wasn't mine, and in my mind I sort of thought that this project would make itself happen. But things don't work that way. Bobby explained it to me with a very supportive phone call.

"You're the director. You're the one pushing this to happen. It will only happen if you work it all out." Or something like that. I was surprised when he had agreed to act in this thing, knowing he was totally busy with a thousand other film projects. He said for me, he would do it. Then I cancelled some shoots. Then I started to feel overwhelmed. I regretted talking about the film, and I regretted asking Bobby to be a part of it. He's a great guy, cool and weird, and he makes tons of movies. He knows his shit, he's worked on big stuff. I felt inferior. Not because of him, he was totally cool and understanding. Supportive. But I felt like an amateur. I was stressed! I like to be creative, I like to write and come up with ideas. Directing I'm not so good at, but someone has to do it. The production stuff, though, I am NOT into that. Scheduling, and working out the locations, and confirming shoot times... It's too much for me. I freaked out and gave up. Sort of.

The vampire movie. What's the status? Currently, it is on hold. Tyler and I are working on finding a good producer to do all the stuff I can't. I thought a small crew would make it easier, but the total opposite proved true. Sometimes it's a good thing to admit when you can't do it all.

So why am I bringing this up? Why even write about this movie that has not been made? Because this zine is called Proof I Exist. It's a zine about me. And the vampire movie is in my life. So, I'm sharing my thoughts with the world. Here they are:

I LOVE that script.

I really want to share this movie with the world.



The help I've gotten thus far from my friends has been awesome.

I feel totally guilty for not getting it done yet.

I am hopeful for that with the right people added to the crew, it will still happen.



Making movies is hard. I forget sometimes. It takes time and effort. People come up with great ideas for movies, then say "dude, I should totally be a director". Coming up with ideas is easy. That's true for books, bands, or any other creative medium. Ideas are free and easy. Actually doing the work and making it happen, that's something else. So we'll see. Stay tuned.



CH Two

HP

The New Roommate

It's been about 3 years since I've had a roommate. The last time, really, was 2001-2005, when I lived in the epic house known as The Command Center. Did I say epic? I meant legendary. No, wait, I meant messy. Anyway, that was a good time and all, but after 4 years of it, I decided it was time to chill out on the partying and whatnot. I found a secluded basement art studio, which was perfect for a couple years, until the loneliness kicked in, which was when Allison and I found ourselves a place together. Yes, living together out of wedlock. Dr. Laura refers to people like me as a "shack-up honey", but it worked for us. The top two floors of a three floor house, allowing us one floor for the dog, and one floor for the cat. (Humans had access to both.) But living with a lover is not the same as living with a roommate. Similar, but not the same.

The first year it was just us, but then it seemed the top floor was mostly used by the dog. An entire bedroom was wasting away. Occasionally I'd set up drums in there, or do some painting, but such activities were mostly for show. To show myself that we used and needed that extra bedroom, but in reality we did not. We talked about getting one of our friends to move in, but it was a tad tricky. They would have to be someone we trusted, with both our stuff and our lives. Can't have a dude sneaking up on ya with a hammer in the middle of the night. Also, they would have to love our dog, because hey, it was mostly her place anyway.

Just about the time we started to think these thoughts, James came along. The timing was perfect. He needed a place to stay, we needed the extra \$\$\$ a month. He's a great roommate, and let me tell you why. Dude is laid back. That's it. He has sort of a stoner attitude, but without all the pot-head stupidity. You know how you dig stoners, cause they're always like "yeah, bro, you can use my computer, or borrow those Cds, totally..." and all that? But then stoners suck, because they are also like "Yo, there is NO WAY you asked me to pick you up from work" and all that. But James is the perfect combo.

He can tap into that vibe, but without becoming stupid dependant on it.

It's nice having some additional creativity in the house. Seeing new drawings, hanging up new paintings. Having someone to talk to about art shit. Having someone to share art supplies with. People can build up a lot of momentum that way, if you do it right. There were some amazing times at The Command Center because of that notion. One person would come home talking about some art project, which inspires you to do something, which inspires them, and back and forth it goes, everyone stepping it up a notch.

He left me a note apologizing for something he didn't need to apologize for. I wrote him one back telling him he had to hear the song I'd written. I took up guitar playing this past summer, and had been trying so hard to mimic the great country pickers, like Hank Williams and Johnny Cash. Little by little I'd written a couple songs, but they usually took a week or a month to materialize. But new roommates provide new inspiration. I sat down one night, and in a couple of hours had a new song. I'd never just WRITTEN A SONG like that before


The next night James came home, and we talked the regular "what's up?" conversation. Then he was like "Oh, I want to hear that song!" So I got my guitar, and gave it my best. I'm trying so hard to get over that feeling of nervousness. But guitar is a whole new realm for me. It's not screaming anger of punk rock, or the fast-paced smashing of drums. It's slower, and straight from the vulnerable part of a person's soul. It's me and a guitar. Wrong notes will occur, and they WILL be heard. I'm terrified to sing in front of anyone but my dog, but I force myself to anyway.

I sang the song I wrote for him, the one with his name in the first line. He smiled, he laughed, he loved it. I stopped three or four times to get it right, and I kept forgetting the words. But he loved it. He clapped along and tried to sing the chorus each time it would come back around. He's awesome and supportive. It reminded me of that time we were all hanging out, and he kept doing this weird stupid dance. None of us knew why he was dancing so awkwardly, and we couldn't get him to stop. He just kept grinning and flailing his arms around, and it was hilarious and fun. I thought about him and that dance, and it made me want to play guitar over and over. Because life is too short to worry so much about how a dance looks or how a song sounds. Sometimes you just have to worry about how it FEELS.

Chapter 3



The End of Loop Distro

 I did zines when I was in high school, then took a break for a couple years. But upon moving to Chicago in 2000, I started thinking about doing them again. I discovered Quimbys, discovered Chicago Comics. Even discovered Laurie's Planet of Sound, and I started to realize there were a lot of good zines in the world. I started reading them, started loving them. Then I started realizing that a lot of the best zines were by people here in Chicago. See, I grew up in Iowa, and



when I like someone's zine, I would write them a letter to tell them so. Writing a letter is one of the most amazing signs of affection a person can demonstrate. Just the act itself shows true emotion. It can show love, or respect, or understanding. Everyone gets mad, but *mad enough to write a letter?* I had grown used to having zine pen-pals, but never had an ACTUAL zine friend to hang out with. Just that one weekend in Ohio when Derek (of Folklore Zine) let me crash at his place. We watched 12 hours of Mr. Show in one setting.

But now I was in a big city, and there were people within biking distance who appreciated zines as much as I did. I started emailing and writing to these different zines. War Against the Idiots, Safety Pin Girl, Meniscus, Lab Rat, Stir Crazy, Worse Than Queer, Foul, Retail Whore, Get Well Soon.... More than I can list here, I started trying to meet these people. I started hearing back, and little by little a network of new friends built up.

I started a new zine called "Proof I Exist", the title taken from Linda O, of Seemingly So. In the back of Seemingly So #4 she said "This zine is Proof I Exist".

Wow. That's what all zines are, all works of art, anything that anyone does, really. Right? We are all working and creating, and leaving traces of ourselves to find. I would carry around copies of my zine, passing them out to girls who I thought were cute, or bands that were on tour. Leaving copies on buses for the next person to come along and find. But there were so many cool zines out there, not just mine. When friends would come out with a new issue, I'd ask for 3 or 4 copies. I started carrying around lots of zines with me, selling them for a buck each at Fireside Bowl. That's where I met Brandon Wetherbee, who was doing the same thing.

There needed to be one place people could go to get cool zines from Chicago. That's what I decided. That's what I wanted. It would serve two goals.

- 1.) Help unite our local scene, and provide a way for zinesters to meet each other.
- 2.) Allow people who don't live in Chicago to see what the Windy City had going on.

Loop Distro started out slow, but built up quick. Krystle, of Milk Milk Lemonade, created a Tetris-styled website for me. I started getting more and more zines. A milk crate full, then two milk crates. More than I could just carry. I got display racks. I met the founder of Zine Guide, I started going to the Allied Media Conference, I started submerging myself in zines.

Allison painted me an awesome banner to take with me when I tabled at different zine conferences. And that bunny suit I'd had for years, and worn often, well it became my official zine-outfit! From hence forth, I could wear the bunny suit while doing non-zine things, but I **COULD NOT** do zine things without wearing the bunny suit...

Loop Distro was a 7-year chapter of my life that has been totally awesome. But all good things must come to an end. I never wanted it to be a job. I never wanted to make money from it, and was ok losing tons of

cash over the years. It was a hobby. It was me trying to help my friends get their zines to new places. Every time I'd fill an order, I'd think "If not for me, this person in _____ would never get to read my friend's awesome zine." I've met tons of nice people, had lots of crazy road trips (remember breaking into that hotel pool in Iowa City!? Ha!), and am totally proud of all that it is and was.

Life is busy, and projects are in abundance. I wish I could do it all. But I'm learning, little by little, that if you cut a few things out, you can focus even more on the things that are left. I love zines, I love zine culture. I will always write zines. But man, I'm sure sick of reviewing them. Ha. Maybe I'll start another distro down the road, but for now, I'm getting back to writing zines, not selling them. It was a hard decision to make, but I feel good now that it's made. I like the idea of Chicago having a zine distro, or several. But I'm not the one to do it any more. Maybe someone else is, I don't know.

Much love to everyone who was ever a part of my distro-journey. Much love to all my pen-pals. Big props to awesome Chicago stuff like Quimbys, YouMeThemEverybody, and other such things. I may not do a distro, and I may not always live in Chicago, but I will always be around. And I will always love getting mail.

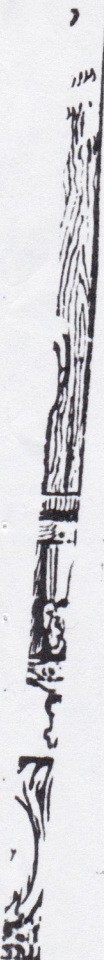


The Hungry Brain



As I began walking my bike down the sidewalk, I realized I had a dilemma on my furry little hands. The damp, evening mist had turned to more of a sprinkle, a drizzle even. A drizzle menacing enough to ruffle the feathers of the evenings attire, my nice chicken outfit. I use the word "nice" in a manner which may lead a person to think I have multiple chicken suits, but that's not exactly accurate. I have two different chicken *masks*, but only the single suit. But it's a nice one. The fur is soft and delicate, layers of fine, yellow tresses, a trail of which is left wherever I go.

On this night I was going to The Hungry Brain to see the premiere of Brandon's movie, "The Shuffle", so I had decided to dress in my nice chicken suit. Earlier in the day I'd been wearing my bunny suit, which, by comparison, is not nearly so nice. See, I do actually have two different bunny suits, and one is considerably nicer than the other. I also have several different rabbit heads, ears, and masks. I've learned that a person can get by with only 3 or 4 animal suits, as long as they have a good stock of masks. (It's a strange thing to realize the type of advice I have to offer the world. "Get the fur suit FIRST. Then one by one, add a rabbit mask, a lamb, a teddy bear, and so on....") After a few years you really start to have some options, and can choose just the type of outfit you'd like for the day. It's pretty funny to dress as a bunny and go to the grocery store, but even funnier when you go to the hardware store. But, for a movie premiere, I thought I would shift it into my chicken suit. Class it up a bit.



But then the rain. The dilemma. I had to think fast. I could either change back into the bunny suit, then ride my bike in the rain, OR I could get Allison's car keys and drive to The Hungry Brain in my beautiful yellow chicken suit. I went with the second choice. Later, while at the bar, I would explain this to people as we all sat around those little tables with the little candles burning in the center. People would come up to me and ask why I was in the chicken suit, and I would tell them, very enthusiastically, "Well, there I was, about to ride off on my bike, when STARTED TO RAIN!" I was already laughing, as I continued, "No, no, true story..." Their eyes would start out big, as if they were really about to hear some grand tale. Perhaps I'd lost a bet, or was part of a parade and the zipper stuck... But the further into the story I got, the less big their eyes would become. Little by little they figured out that the story was "oh, he's weird." I kept holding up my hands, palms out, and telling them "True story, true story!", a raconteur's device which I'd always admired, but never used. I don't know that I will ever use it again. Unless I'm lying. Then maybe I'll say it.

Everyone was curious about the chicken suit, and what that had to do with the movie. Dan said "Who are you? How am I supposed to check an ID on a chicken?"

I responded with ferocity, pulling off the mask and yelling, "Who am I!? WHO AM I!?" He laughed.

"Oh, hey Billy."

But I wasn't letting him off that easily.

"Who am I? I want to know, WHO IS DAN!?"

I yelled it at him, trying to sound accusatory.

"You mean me?"

"I mean who is the Dan who has 83,000 points on Arkanoid!? WHO IS THE DAN WHO CAN ACHIEVE LEVEL SEVEN?!"

He was laughing now. "Just giving you something to shoot for." Over the summer I discovered this old arcade game in the back of the bar called Arkanoid. It is simple and wonderful, and I'd grown accustomed to stopping in for a couple dollars worth of games on my way home from work each night. I have all the rest of the top scores, but not the #1 spot. It haunts me.

I went inside and everyone continued to ask me about the chicken costume. Everyone except for Brandon. He knew why I wore a chicken suit to his movie screening, so there was no need to discuss it. I wore it cause I could, and also because no one else would.

The Hungry Brain has always been a cool place to just chill the fuck out. It's dark, mello, laid back. Plus Brandon and Dan work there. Every Monday Brandon hosts some sort of event. Zine readings, open mics, comedy jams, that sort of thing. I had read at a couple, and had actually been there just a few weeks before. Back in the summer time, Michelle Aiello asked if I would be part of a variety show. I quickly agreed, as I love variety shows. "You can read from a zine or play guitar or something" she told me. I didn't want to read from my zine, and I didn't know how to play guitar. But

I told her I'd come up with something.

I thought it over for a few weeks, and bounced different ideas off of Allison. I came up with some terrible ones, and a few good ones, and she helped me sort through them. Yet, the week of the event rolled around and I was totally unprepared.

What was I gonna do? All the million ideas and performance options rushed through my head, but I couldn't decide on any of them. I was nervous, and wanted to just not show up, but at the same time I think it's important to do things that make you nervous. Although I didn't know how to play guitar when I had agreed to be a part of the show, I had since learned. I was about 4 months into the whole "owning a guitar" process, and nothing made me more nervous than the idea of playing it in front of others. So guitar it was.

I got up on the stage, shaky voice, and played the only three songs I was able to play. It wasn't really all that great, but the crowd seemed to like it. They were entertained, which is the point of a variety show. I was proud of myself. People smiled and congratulated me as I left the stage, and I promptly went into the restroom so I could throw up. That's how nervous I had been. The men's room was occupied, so I had to use the ladies' instead. My stomach had been in knots all evening, then released with a rush of exhilaration after completing a frightening task. It was a big step for me, and seemed unblemished. That is until I got home to tell Allison the story.

She had been the one who had supported me as I learned those first chords, she was the one I bought the guitar from in the first place. She was my number one fan, and without her I would have never had the courage or soul to play guitar. She had missed my big debut, and through no fault of hers. I had never told her I'd planned on playing guitar that night.

"Why wouldn't you want me there? Isn't it a big deal? Why wouldn't you share that moment with me?" I didn't know, and I couldn't answer. I felt horrible. She'd missed out on a special moment in my life, but actually it was more than that. I had PREVENTED her from even having the chance. I stayed up all night feeling guilty, and at some point I realized that it wasn't until I knew she couldn't make the even that I had decided to play guitar at it. It was on such a subconscious level, and it wasn't easy for me to understand why I'd done it in that way. But then I realized that of all the people in the world I might be nervous in front of while playing guitar, none more so than her. The basic stage fright stuff was strong when I was in front of others, but I really felt no need to "impress" anyone. But with Allison, all I ever hope to do is impress her. I try new foods, buy flowers for no reason, even go so far as to wear Polo cologne! The nervousness of performing in front of a crowd would have been magnified by a thousand if she had been in it!

The next morning I went and got my guitar. The one I bought from her. I went into our bedroom where she was just starting to wake up. I sat down and strummed a few chords. I proceeded to play those same three songs again. My voice was even more shaky, my

stomach tied up all over again, but this time I managed to get through it all without vomiting. Good thing. Nothing ruins romance like vomit.

I apologized and promised her that I DID want to share my life with her. We hugged and kissed and made up. I haven't played any shows since then, but I know I will have to make sure Allison has front row seats once I do. That scares the shit out of me. But all the more reason to do it, right?



CH 5IVE

The Loss of Loved Ones

The year of 2008 was pure shit. Anyone want to argue that? State your case. I'll listen, but I won't agree. I don't know what happened. It was a rough one, though. I guess we got Barack Obama in the House, so that was a cool thing to watch. (Not that I'm a HUGE fan of his. Only a sort-of fan.) Hmmm... Anything else? Kelly will say something about the Phillies, but I'm not really a baseball fan either. So yeah. 2008. Didn't dig it.

There were a lot of things that led to the not-so-greatness of 2008. A lot of small things, but some pretty significant ones as well. In Proof I Exist #8 I wrote a lot about the passing of my father. That happened in 2005. Two good friends, Tim Gerbrich, and Kittie Mhz, passed away, then my father. My mom always said "Death comes in threes", and it had been proven true. But last year showed me again.

I was at work when I got the call about Brendan. Tears, sobs, my friend could barely say the words. "He's gone," she told me. I didn't know what to think. My head was full and empty at the same time. I'd just seen him the night before, talked with him. I left the art show and went home. But after the show there'd been a party, and then a fight, or something. I didn't know, it wasn't clear. But he'd been stabbed. He'd bled to death in an alleyway.

I'd known people who had passed away. But I'd never known someone who was murdered. It's an entirely different set of feelings to deal with. Much tougher, for me at least. He was 24, and now he's gone.

He was a talented artist and graphic designer, but now he's gone. He was a good guy, fun to hang out with, and had a loud obnoxious laugh... but now he's gone. And why? For what?

I could write zines and zines about it. About the process I went through to deal with it, about the thoughts I have every day. And I will. I'll be writing about it, in one way or another, for the rest of my life. But not this round, not just yet. A year and a half later, and it's still tough to talk about. It's just so layered. The realness of city life. The rawness. The new level of understanding. Every single day there is a murder in this town, and now I cry for all of them. Because I understand that every day a new pocket of mourning explodes on the map. These bursts have been layering up for years, until every block of every neighborhood has a person, or an entire family, who can tell you about their

loved one who was killed. If you live here long enough, you will know someone who was mugged, or raped, or murdered. We're just people stacked up on top of each other with no room to breath, so we fight and kill and drive too fast, and life is just plain hard some times.

I don't want to talk about Brendan, and all the sadness. I don't even want to talk about the good, of which there is plenty as well. Getting to know his family through all this, bonding even closer with my friends. For all the bad things, there are still good ones, and maybe it is the mix that serves as the point of it all.

The same weekend that Brendan died, I had another loss in my life. The same weekend. Dan Murphy, another friend, passed away as well. Different sort of friend, and a different foe who took him down.

He was the accountant at my store, and had battled cancer for years. He had a rough voice, and was sort of crazy, and that's why he fit in with all of us. He complained as a way of making jokes, and those who got it thought it was funny. I got it. He passed away, and I went to his wake the day before I drove to Madison to go to Brendan's. What a shitty summer. Not long after that my mom told me that Grandpa was feeling sick. Death comes in threes. I was worried right away, but tried not to show it.

When I was a kid we would go down and stay with my Grandpa Hunter every summer. It was me, my brother Aaron, and my two cousins, Chas and Joe. "The Four Shotguns" we called ourselves, and the adventures we had throughout our childhood could fill any series of books you could manage to title. A lot of these adventures occurred in southern Missouri, where my Grandpa raised us like cowboys for two weeks a year. He taught us how to play poker, how to drive pickup trucks, how to herd cattle. He'd let us drink coffee if we wanted, or some times beer. He helped us build a tree house once, and by help I mean he gave us the lumber and power tools and told us to figure it out. We did. We figured it all out, and were too young to do any of it, but we did it anyway. That's how the cowboy stuff works. You just do it. And if you complain, by God someone smacks you.

By July I was on a Greyhound to Springfield. My mom sounded worried during our last phone call. All I could think about was when my dad died, and how I wasn't there. I should have been. I'd been coming back home a couple times a month since he had been sick, but I didn't go back that weekend. My brother was there at his side for a lot of it, and told me about the crazy dreams dad had during those last few days, those last few hours. Dreaming about his deceased relatives, and talking to them as if they were in the room. My brother was at his side, and I should have been as well, and I will always regret it. So I got on a bus and headed towards Missouri. When I got off the bus my mom came over and gave me a big hug, tears welling up.

"I'm so glad you're here, son..." she said into my chest. She pulled back, hands on my shoulders, and looked me in the eyes. "Your Grandpa passed away last night".

I felt like I had failed again, getting back just after it was too late. But it wasn't too late, and maybe I was just in time. My mother had just lost her father. It was a strange thing, but she needed me. Our life long roles had been reversed, and now she was counting on me for strength, for comfort, and for the reassurance that things would be ok.

The funeral was a few days later. Everyone came out. My brother drove down with his two kids, and all my cousins were there. We were the pallbearers. Grandpa hadn't made many requests, but that was one of them. He was a cowboy, and he wanted a cowboy funeral.

He wanted to be buried in a pine box built by the Amish family that lived over by his place. He wanted to be buried in his boots and his hat. And he wanted his grandsons to carry the box over to the grave. We had an early morning funeral, Cowboy Bob said a few words. Apparently, my grandpa had been attending the outdoor cowboy church for some time. A handful of fellas would meet up every so often, under this tree by a river, and they would talk about God. It seemed pretty perfect.

I stared at that pine box there, and listened to a cowboy talk about God. I'd always loved and appreciated everything about my grandpa. He was always a reminder of what I came from. In most ways I've never been the rough, tough, cowboy type, but I've always known that those were my roots. My dad was a farmer, and his dad. My mom, too. Cowboys and farmers, the salt of the earth types from which the majority of us are descended. The same types of people that city folk make fun of, or don't understand. But I'm a farmer and a city slicker all at once, and I have a deep appreciation for both. My grandpa did, too, and when I'd come visit with eyebrow rings he'd say things like "Alright, if I can beat you at a game of cards, I'm gonna pull them things out with pliers." And even though I knew he could, I knew he wouldn't. And if he did, even then it wasn't nothing personal. Just fun and games, and cowboy talk.

The last time I'd been down was the summer before. Allison came with, and I'm so thankful she did. To have met the legend of my grandfather. He showed her his massive arrowhead collection, all of which were dug out of the cave. "The Cave", a massive Ozark-style hole in the hill that went back and up and down and around, for miles.

None of us had ever found an end to it, though every summer we would explore further and further, encountering snakes and bats, and 'the bone room'. The best of his collection were mounted in a glass frame, and hung there in the living room. He knew which arrowheads had been used for which type of hunting, which stones were used as tools for cutting or scraping, and he knew which tribes were around at different times through the Missouri history. There were some things in life he didn't know, but when it came to the things he DID know, by God he knew all about them. He knew everything a person could about cattle, he knew how to build his own houses, and he knew how to entertain anyone he happened across.

"Maybe we'll go down and get some Moonshine," he told us that night.

Allison's eyes got big.

"What? Real Moonshine?"

"Oh yeah! I got an ol' boy down thare, he whips up batches for me from time to time." My grandpa's speech was slow and drawn, especially when he knew someone was hanging on his every word. He was one of the best story-tellers I'd ever known, and he used it to his advantage whenever he could, whether business or personal life. You know that game 'Balderdash'? It's a game where people make up definitions to strange words, and everyone has to guess which are real, and which are not.

My grandpa very well may have invented that game. Everything he said was amazing, but not all of it was true. He was a master-bullshitter, and did it his whole life, to the point that it was almost an art form. You wanted to listen to everything he said, true or not.

"Yeah, he's got an old truck down there by Susie's, out there in a field. You know Susie, right? That girl from the TV?"

Turns out this girl from season one of Survivor had bought a house from my grandpa, and now they were good friends. When we met her, I knew why. She pulled on her boots and we went arrowhead hunting in the cave. She was loud, hilarious, a bit obnoxious, and totally down to earth. She was great, and she fit right in with all of us. That night she brought over a DVD before heading home. It was season one of Survivor, ha. So me, Allison, my mom, Grandpa, and his wife Kathy, we watched it. None of us had ever seen Survivor, then we watched an entire season in a single setting. It was Missouri after sundown, we hadn't much else to do anyway. We cheered Susie on, already knowing that she lost by the end. But we cheered anyway.

The next day we went for a drive. Grandpa pulled out into the middle of some pasture, some little clearing at the bottom of a hill. There was a run down truck with grass growing around the tires.

"Go see what's in the front seat there!"

Grandpa yelled at me as he pulled our truck to a stop. I hopped out and ran over to it. I pulled the door open and sitting on the front seat was a big stone. I stood to the side so Grandpa could see inside.

"What's under that rock?!" he yelled over. I moved the rock and to reveal a wad of crumpled cash.

"Alright, put it back! Get on in! We'll have to check back in a few days!"

This was the system. The Moonshine system. Some good ol' boy made up his own liquor, that real nasty stuff you hear about in Johnny Cash songs, the kind of gut-rot that can strip paint and clean car batteries. Some good ol' boy made the stuff, and if my Grandpa wanted some, he'd put \$8 under a rock on the seat of this

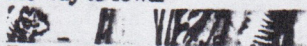
run down truck in the middle of nowhere. That ol' boy had his spots to check, and if ever he came by and found \$8, he'd take the cash and leave a mason jar full of Moonshine. Seemingly, he had a number of checkpoints all over down there, and every local farmer had one of their own special spots. This was the system. This was straight out of a Billy-Bob Thorton movie, only for real.

I stood there, staring at that pine box, holding my mother's hand. I thought about all this, and so much more. We never got our Moonshine. It came a few days after Allison and I returned to Chicago. I don't really drink alcohol, but Moonshine from the Ozarks? I would have split a jar with my baby. But I'm happy to have the story. I'm happy to have so many stories about my grandpa like that. He was a hell of a guy. He was a true life cowboy in a time when they are more and more rare. He was hilarious, he was kind, and he lived every day like it might be his last. He spent all his money and had fun doing it. When it was finally time to go, he was ready. He led a good, hard, cowboy life, and I'm so fucking fortunate to have known him. But that don't mean I don't fucking miss him. I do, and I always will.



The Quest to be Friends with Everyone

I think it all stems from the time I was 8 years old. Doesn't everything? I mean, not 8, necessarily, but young. Youth. Those first few years form how we deal with the many decades which will follow. When I was younger, my family moved around quite a bit, through Wyoming and Colorado. We settled down when I was 5, in Grand Junction, a wonderful little mountain town just almost in Utah. I was enrolled in Kindergarten, then First Grade, and part of Second. It was then that my parents decided to move us back to Iowa, where they were both originally from. The move proved to be the best thing for us, but at the time all I knew was that I was getting ready to move away from the only friends I had. Friends that I'd had for 3 whole years, almost half my life! I cried all the way to Iowa.



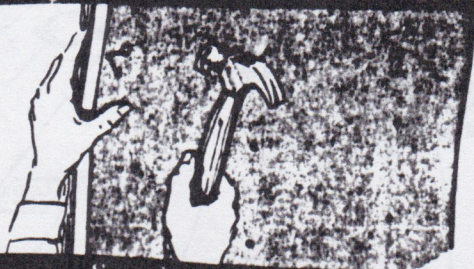
Eventually I made new friends. I spent 10 years making friends before spreading my wings. But deep down, I think I've always had a strange fear of losing all my friends. It causes me to seek out new friendships all the time, even if it means forcing them out of awkward situations. And I want to keep in touch, I always want to keep in touch. "Pen-pals, at least!" I will say, although pen-pals in today's society is actually the most complicated form of friendship. Maybe that's why it is still my favorite. I get so excited when a dear old friend writes me a letter, or even a postcard. I save them, and save the addresses, proof that I have real friends out there in the world. Should I ever get lonely, or feel friendless, I can write one of them a letter, and BAM, my worth has been proven.

But it's not just about racking up large numbers of friends, and it is certainly not about a popularity contest. If you want to take the time to listen to me, there's actually some deeper thinking and theories behind it, beyond my simple fear of abandonment bullshit. There are so many people in the world, more and more all the time. And each one of us has a tendency to imagine our own lives as being the main story. But I try to imagine myself as a special guest, or secondary plotline, and think of everyone ELSE as being lead characters. This is a tough mindset for a writer to achieve, believe me. But each person I meet, I try to imagine what sort of day they've had, and in what way they will add me into their life story.

I try to be a worthy supporting character to whatever plotline they are working through. Not many people keep journals these days, but some weirdos out there (like me) still do. I value every interaction I have, and in the off chance that the person I'm dealing with keeps a journal, I want them to consider adding me to it. Is that strange and creepy?

Probably. Fuck it though. There are no small people, no small stories. We are all humans! We are all related, we are all of the same energy. One infinite spider web of connections. It's that whole Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon.

I love and value my friends. I know the birthdays of all my past girlfriends. I try my best to keep track of where I go, who I talk to, friends I make. In my mind I can visualize that web of connections, and each friend I make connects me to a whole new branch of it. You can see this in small communities and subcultures. I went to Madison Zinefest, where I met Milo of QZAP, who also knows my friends Kelly and Dave, who is married to Kisha, and they all came to Chicago for a zine reading once. It all connects. But I want it to go outside the zine community, outside the art community. I want it to just go on forever, for my whole life. I hate losing contact with old friends. I want to be friends with everyone forever. Especially Cale. He taught me how to shoot guns. Life is weird like that. Weird and awesome.



So write me a letter! I'll write back. Even if it takes a couple months, I'll write back... We don't have to be BFF or anything, just FF. Love ya!



John 7.

The End of the World

When I was in sixth grade I would read these books in the library. There was a little section, and I camped out there. The witches of Salem, UFOs, telekinesis, all that good shit. At some point I stumbled across the concept of "predictions", the most interesting of which always concerned the end of the world. This was when I was a kid, so mid-90's. The big event on the horizon back then was the year 2000! Remember Y2K? "Planes will fall out of the sky" they told us! What a crock of shit. There was also a day the Chinese had predicted, and that other day in 2005 when all the planets of our solar system were lined up. And of course 2012... But roll the calendar back to the year 1000, and you'll find people saying the same things. Christians started a huge war with the Pagans, as a matter of fact, converting them by force in order to "save" them before Christ's return. Wow, lucky them.

Anyway, here are just a few more dates in history when people got their panic on. I stole them without permission from:

<http://www.religioustolerance.org/> Enjoy!

500 CE: This was the first year-with-a-nice-round-number-panic. The antipope Hippolytus and an earlier Christian academic Sextus Julius Africanus had predicted Armageddon at about this year.

1179: John of Toledo predicted the end of the world during 1186. This estimate was based on the alignment of many planets.

1284: Pope Innocent III computed this date by adding 666 years onto the date the Islam was founded.

1346 and later: The black plague spread across Europe, killing one third of the population. This was seen as the prelude to an immediate end of the world. Unfortunately, the Christians had previously killed a many of the cats, fearing that they might be familiars of Witches. The fewer the cats, the more the rats. It was the rat fleas that spread the black plague.

1669: The Old Believers in Russia believed that the end of the world would occur in this year. 20 thousand burned themselves to death between 1669 and 1690 to protect themselves from the Antichrist.

1890: There is a combination of confusing quotes from Joseph Smith, founder of The Church of Christ (Mormons), which suggests that he believed he would see the second coming of Christ when he turned 85. He never lived that old, nor did the Son of Man come back down to earth.

1914 was one of the more important estimates of the start of the war of Armageddon by the Jehovah's Witnesses (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society). They based their prophecy of 1914 from prophecy in the book of Daniel, Chapter 4. The writings referred to "seven times". The WTS interpreted each "time" as equal to 360 days, giving a total of 2520 days. This was further interpreted as representing 2520 years, measured from the starting date of 607 BCE. This gave 1914 as the target date. When 1914 passed, they changed their prediction; 1914 became the year that Jesus invisibly began his rule.

1919: Meteorologist Albert Porta predicted that the conjunction of 6 planets would generate a magnetic current that would cause the sun to explode and engulf the earth on DEC-17.

1948: During this year, the state of Israel was founded. Some Christians believed that this event was the final prerequisite for the second coming of Jesus. Various end of the world predictions were made in the range 1988 to 2048.

1982: Pat Robertson predicted a few years in advance that the world would end in the fall of 1982. The failure of this prophecy did not seem to adversely affect his reputation.

1988-OCT-11: Edgar Whisenaut, a NASA scientist, had published the book "88 Reasons why the Rapture will Occur in 1988." It sold over 4 million copies.




One final note of interest. It was recently discovered that the late great Sir Issac Newton, a man who has always been known as a rational scientist, also had a deeply religious side. As a way of calming the many people of his time who were predicting the end of the world, he said something to the effect of: "...the Apocalypse will come in 2060 - exactly 1,260 years after the foundation of the Holy Roman Empire..." I guess we all like to make our predictions, eh? And if 2012 fizzles out, we still have 2060.

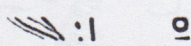



CHAP 8

The New Computer



I held off as long as I could. But things kept getting worse and worse. The fan stopped working, so I replaced it. Then certain files stopped opening for me. The monitor, oh man. Every time I turned it off, I worried that it may not turn back on next time. It popped, crackled, and there were black lines through the screen. Half the screen would be stretched to twice what it should be, while the other half was crunched down to half the proper size. But I was stubborn. I'd had the old computer since I moved to Chicago in 2000, it was a gift from my mother and had served me well for nine years. Nine years! Can you imagine? That's like a million in computer years.



I put up with all these abnormalities, that is, until my mouse started frizting out. In anger, I slammed it down on the desk. But it wasn't normal anger, it was that special brand of computer anger, which is a specific and illogical anger, one which stirs up quickly. I slammed the mouse down, over and over, until the last smash managed to knock over the vase of water which was setting beside my keyboard. Allison had left a rose for me to find two days before, a gentle token of love to brighten the room. Slow-motion, the vase fell over, directly onto my keyboard, abnd for thwe resyt opf thwe week mny words lookfd liojke thias. Each key melted into the one beside it, and simple emails became a process of mass deletion.

I decided I wanted a nice computer. One I could download music onto, one I could use to edit videos. All that stuff, you know, a kick ass computer. I don't really own anything that kicks ass. I've never owned a house, I've never spent more than \$1200 on a car, never more than \$100 on a bike. I've always just gotten whatever would get me by. But I decided to get a kick-ass computer.

I don't know much about computers, but learned quick. About how much RAM is a good amount, how many videos a 1TB hard drive could hold. I looked online, talked to friends, and started scoping out the stores. Best Buy had helpful people, but not that much selection. I wanted to go to Microcenter, a store here in Chicago where all my geeky friends like to go. A place where you can buy parts and put them together, if you

happen to be smart enough to do that. The question of Mac vs. PC was all around me. I know both, I've used both. Allison has a Mac, and it kicks ass. But Allison is different from me. She has a tattoo on her arm to prove it, a Cantonese symbol which translates into "Moving forward, without fear." When she wants something, she goes and gets it, a characteristic I've always admired. She needed a new car, so she went and got one. She needed a new computer, she ordered one. My boss, Ted, has that same trait. When it's time to do something, he gets it done.

But I'm not like that. I think too much. I analyze, and ponder, and wonder, and mull it over. Neither Ted nor Allison would have put up with a weird half-screen monitor, but I squinted at that thing for weeks. I worry too much about the potential disappointment I might feel in the choice I finally make, so all too often I delay the choice all together. I don't think it's an unusual thing, I think a lot of people do this. Still, it's something I'd like to improve upon.

So yes, PC vs. Mac. Mac vs. PC. I watched those commercials and hated them. I sort of knew they were right. Macs are so much better in so many ways. Simpler. You click on things, and they work. You install them, and they work. You have a problem, you call someone and they fix it. But that awesome, simple, user-friendly device doubles the price of the actual machine. For \$2000 I could get a PC with 1TB hard drive, and 9G of RAM. Those same stats on a MAC would cost me \$4500. Yikes. What sort of MAC would I get for \$2000? Not enough space to make videos. Ugh. Decisions.

Tyler said I should check out Fry's. He'd driven me out there a few months before when I decided I needed a new video camera. The place was huge, and Tyler was ready to go at a moment's notice. For him the place is a playground of electronics, sound equipment, video games. He would probably work there for free if they let him take extended breaks.

Buy and Home Depot had some sort of discount-mega-child. It was like, a mile wide, and a mile tall, and stacked with electronics. Now, I'm the sort of person who hates big corporate places like that. But when I'm spending thousands of dollars, I want as many options as possible.

We scoped out the Fry's, and I wrote down numbers. Thought it over, came back a few days later, and bought an HP. Also bought a sweet Acer monitor to go with it. I was excited. After weeks of contemplation, I had made a decision. I came home, hooked that thing up, and started playing. Then, less than an hour into use, **THAT FUCKING COMPUTER FROZE THE FUCK UP!!!!!! AHHH!!!!!!**

The anger, frustration, and general annoyance I felt was so overwhelming, that even now as I write this, I sort of don't even want to continue the story. I don't want to tell it, because the whole thing is annoying. Why must technology suck? All I could think about was Kittie Mhz, my good friend who passed away in 2005. We lived together for a summer, and I will always remember so many things about her. She was funny, weird, sarcastic, sweet, and knew more about computers than any friend I'd ever had. But as much as she loved

computers, holy shit did she ever hate them even more. She had demeaning names for every application and program ever created. AOHell, Nutscape Navigator, Microsucks Computers, and so on. I threw a fit the way she would have, and then took that fucking computer back to Fry's.

Now, again, I will explain Fry's Electronics, since most of you have probably never been to one. It's huge. And a million little worker bees work there, buzzing about as if they are important, but most of them aren't. There was only one guy I met there who I liked, and I wish I'd bought the computer from him. He was tall, in his 50s, and complained to me about how much his job sucked. "I'm making \$8 an hour selling computers to these punk kid know-it-alls!" He talked a lot about video games and said the word fuck in every sentence because he knew it would make me like him. He was right, and it worked. But I had met him on my scouting day. When I came back to buy it I had to deal with "Derek". He was young and wore a suit that was too big for him. I hate it when a 20-something wears a suit. You can tell they think they're moving up some ladder, really going somewhere. Well, when you get there, Derek, you can fuck off. You act like Ryan from The Office. Like a lame, Season Four Ryan.

I brought back the computer and a whole new series of annoyances lined up to greet me. They had to check it out, inspect it, ask me about it... I tried to be simple. "This computer sucks. It froze up the first time I used it. I want my money back." But they didn't want to give me back my money. I'd paid in cash, and they didn't have that kind of cash just laying around. (Bullshit.) They said they could swap it out for another, and Derek came up to inspect his commission. He tried to talk me into other computers, and then I was ready to ditch the whole thing based on spite. That squirmy jerk didn't deserve whatever bonus I helped him to get.

I had to come back a few days later, talk to some managers, and arrange for my \$1500 in cash to be ready. They thought it was crazy that I had bought a big ticket item in cash. Yeah, well, I think the world is crazy. I think a lot of things are crazy. But holding money in my hand to buy something, then buying it, that doesn't seem so crazy.

The next week I went to Microcenter and met a salesperson named Kelly. She was awesome. She was nice, she was smart. I told her what I wanted, and she showed me what they had. She was a good sales person. She was able to seem smarter than me without making me feel dumb. That's the key. It's important. I don't want to buy something complicated from someone who is an idiot. But at the same time, I don't want to feel like an idiot myself.

I bought another PC. A Dell this time, and yes it had problems as well. I couldn't get online, then I couldn't upload my video. But unlike Derek, Kelly was eager to help me. I complained to her about Fry's, and she said something to the effect of "They do quantity sales over there." Meaning that they sell TONS of stuff, and when some of it doesn't work, oh well. She helped me work out all my issues, and now I have a computer that kicks ass.

It's amazing to think back through my life in regards to computers. I remember when my mom brought home that first Mac LCIII. With Hyper-Studio, remember that awesome program? I remember the green-screens, and 5" floppy disks. I remember the first time we got hooked up to the internet, with dial-up, and you had to tell your family if you were using the computer, because they wouldn't be able to make any calls until you signed off. I write these things, because we are now at a point where so many of us take them for granted. They are tools. The days I spent without a computer were awful! I couldn't wait to get another one! Kids now days don't know what life without the internet would be like, sort of how I can't imagine a life without cars or TV. I don't think total dependency on any of those things is good, we always need a balance. But man, having something that kicks ass is pretty great. Especially a computer.





Chapter NINE

The Cell Phone

For so long, I had avoided them. I mean, really just AVOIDED them. I remember when people first started using cell phones. (I know, we're on a technology flashback, eh? Down memory lane...) All the punks hated them, remember? I never hated them. Just didn't want one. Then one by one, all my punk friends started getting cell phones. Those first few in our circle would try to pretend they didn't have one, or that it was for "emergencies only". But in reality they were stoked about the awesomeness of cell phones. The freedom, the fun. Oh, and then they put cameras in them! And you could send dirty pictures back and forth, or you could text, (I mean txt) and all that snaz! Whoa, cell phones!

I still didn't want one. In the beginning it was disinterest. Then it grew into a bit of annoyance. But then it grew into so much more. Years rolled by, and my friends were amazed that I was able to survive without a cell phone. They'd ask me why I didn't have one, and I'd say I didn't want to go into it, but that basically "I just don't think I need one". Which was true. I didn't need one. Above and beyond that, I didn't WANT one. There were so many reasons, I never knew where to start. Besides, who wants to hear some lunatic rant about his bullshit thoughts and beliefs on life?

See, that's what's great about zines. There is no senior editor, there are no advertisers to please. This is PROOF I EXIST, the zine *I* created, and the forum in which I can rant about any half-crazed conspiracies that occupy my brain! Mwa-ha-ha-ha! And see, you, as the reader, may simply skim ahead if you have decided you don't give a shit about my thoughts on cell phones. (No, seriously, it's ok! I give you permission to skip ahead to the chapter on The Vegas Wedding!)

Have you ever read the book, 1984? You should. Do you ever think about big corporations? Or the government? Or all those "evil" institutions that are working hard on controlling our thoughts, actions, and lives in general? Well, I do. I think about those things. I think about how the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. I think about how we are encouraged to buy things we can't afford, causing us to work harder and harder to pay for more and more things. I don't want things. Ok, some times I do. Kick ass computers, piles of baby dolls, weird thrift store videos. Ok, so I admit, I am a consumer as well, whether I like it or not. But see, all these big scary people that want to control us, they are figuring out how to do it. Force doesn't work. If someone held a gun up and told you to buy something, it just wouldn't work. People would rebel, because actually humans love to rebel. So the government doesn't force us into things. They trick us into things.

What the fuck does this have to do with cell phones? Ok, well, here are just a few thoughts. A few thoughts that shield me away from cell phones. Any cell phone conversation can be monitored. Have you thought about that?

Not just by the government, but by any citizen who purchases the right type of scanner. No wires means that your conversation is transmitted through the air and can be picked up by anyone. Oh, but the government can also monitor any and all calls, without telling you. The CIA and FBI do this all the time. They can contact any phone company and get a record of any call or txt you've made. They can order that a certain person be under constant surveillance and that all transmissions they send be recorded. Oh, and they can track where you go. When you call, your cell phone transmits to a series of satellites, then the signal bounces down to whomever you are calling. The satellites must find and record where you are at all times to make sure you always have a signal. Therefore if you are carrying a cell phone around, as most people do, you are being tracked.

Is that scary? Not to most people. Most people say "Yeah, but if you aren't breaking the law, why should I care?" That's not the point. Once our society is being fully monitored, while also becoming dumber one generation after another, they will simply change laws until they create one you are breaking. Allowing such an easy invasion of privacy seems so lazy. But we have voluntarily agreed to carry around these tracking devices, so we've allowed the invasion without even realizing it. The government is in our homes, in our pockets. I don't know. I just think it's creepy. It's a set-up.

So I know what else you say. People say it all the time if I try to bring this stuff up. They say "Well, just be careful what you talk about on the phone." Well, first of all that's not freedom. That's fear-induced self-censorship. If you say certain trigger words, such as bomb or terrorist, over the phone, automated systems begin monitoring your conversation. Same thing if you use certain words in emails or txts. Now, I'm not saying that we should abolish the government, or allow bombings to occur. These methods, which creep me out, have prevented a lot of violence, actually. But come on...

What actual terrorist is going to say "Yo, **TERRORIST** friend! Let's go do that **BOMBING** tomorrow!" Homeland Security is, in large part, a front for creating social monitoring systems, systems which can then be tweaked and changed as time goes on, the leash on the American people constantly getting shorter and shorter. Maybe they'll start scanning for words like 'protest' or 'gun laws'. This isn't a Dem/Rep thing. Actually, I think the whole "Big Brother" concept is one that bugs the conservatives more than the liberals. Do I sound crazy yet? Well, let's keep goin.

Your phone has a microphone in it, yes? Well, that device can be activated remotely by persons other than yourself. Did you know that? Most people don't. Cnet did a story on it years ago, and Cnet is legit.

http://news.cnet.com/2100-1029_3-6140191.html

You could be sitting around, chilling out, not even using your phone. But your phone is in your pocket, like how we all have phones, right? The FBI can order your company to activate the microphone on your phone, then they can monitor and record your real life conversations. Often they can also check your email through your phone. How about that? Although email monitoring is pretty simple most of the time, anyway. Creeped out? I am. They can also use your phones to take pictures. Oh, and if you have a camera on your computer at home, anyone with the right hacking skills (government or otherwise) can turn your camera on and watch you at your computer without you ever knowing they were doing it. NOW are you creeped out?

So yeah. I could actually go on. But I don't want to. That's a taste of why I don't like cell phones. I also don't like the money they cost, the society they offer, or the dependency they create. I don't like that the massive amount of cell signals are confusing and killing off our honeybee population. Why don't more people know about the bees? It's actually really fucking serious. No bees equal no pollen, equal no food. But man, people love talking into cell phones, so much so that face to face interactions are becoming less and less valued. Automated grocery stores and robot customer service, and all these impersonal things that keep coming at us. Every time I'd see a jerk walking down the street I'd think "That douche bag has a cell phone, you know he does." Of course he does, everyone does, not just the douche bags and prissy bitches, but also all my best friends and loved ones. Punks and weirdos and graffiti artists. Even most of my anarchist friends. But I just hated them. I never wanted a fucking cell phone.

So why did I get one? Well, for as much hate as I have, I am also full of love. I hate the world, I hate technology, I hate progress in general. But man, I love Allison. I love her daughter, I love my mom and my friends. I'm full of a lot of love.

I spent a week in Santa Fe. My awesome friend, Clara, was the perfect host. She let me sleep on her couch at night, and let me ride her bike in the day. Her cute adobe house with stacks of books and no TV offered an amazing simplicity that I fell in love with. The happiness of keeping things simple struck me pretty strongly, and for 5 days I would bike around, take photos, and write letters to my friends back home. I missed them all, mostly Allison. There were only 2 payphones in town, and once a day I called from the one outside the public library. I'd plug in my \$3 of quarters and hope she'd answer. One of the nights we got to talking, and she had been missing me as well. She told me how much she hated that I didn't have a cell phone. How nice it is to be able to call a person you love whenever you want. How impossible it was to reach me, and how some times she just wanted to hear my voice. It all made sense, and I was sad for what I'd put her through over the years. Not being able to call a person is sort of a small annoyance, but when you stack those small annoyances up for years and years and years, well... It adds up.

A few days later we were talking again. A much lighter, more playful conversation. The cell phone thing came up again. She gave me an ultimatum. She gave it to me in the form of a joke, but I got the message. "Any man I marry would have to have a cell phone!" It was funny and silly. But as soon as she said it, I decided to get one. It was that simple. And the fact that I totally fucking hate cell phones, but was willing to get one, it made me realize something else. I was ready to marry Allison. I wanted to. After all these years, it was time to make it happen. But we'll save that story for next chapter.

I thought about the cell phone thing. I had one more day in Santa Fe, then it was time to head to Las Vegas for a few more. A week away from Chicago, which is always a good thing. But sort of tough when you're missin your loved one. I called her randomly from Vegas several times. By the time I got to the airport to fly home, I was really missing her. I had a 3 hour layover so I went to the payphone. I begged the guy at the donut stand for quarters, but he only gave me enough for a 2 minute conversation. In a bold move I pulled out my credit card. Ha. I knew I shouldn't. It went against everything I think and believe. I try to pay cash for everything. But I was missing Allison, so I plunked in my card and called her back. We talked and talked and talked and talked. I had a 3 hour layover, so a thirty minute phone call was a wonderful thing. Until I got back to Chicago to find my bank account had been overdrawn. Ha. Want to guess how much that lovey-dovey phone call cost? I wouldn't tell Allison when she asked me later, but I'll tell her, and you, now. Fifty-three dollars. Yes, let me put it in numbers for you. \$53. For one call. Time for a cell phone.



The process of getting a cell phone went pretty much exactly the same as the process for getting a new computer. Therefore I won't bore you with it. But once I finally got one, I held my chin high with pride, while simultaneously dropping my head in shame. Empowered and defeated, all in one move. For better or worse, I am slightly more a part of society. Allison and I talk all the time, I call my mom more often, and friends can call ME instead of just calling me at work. People I know seem to like it. I don't, but that's ok. I do like txtng though, I have to admit that. Txtng is great. It just sucks that I have to take the battery out of my phone every time I do some illegal shit. Sheesh, how annoying....

CHAPTER



The Vegas Wedding

I've been telling the story every day for two months now, so let me tell it one more time for those who haven't heard. Everyone always asks if it was planned, and the answer is 'sort of, not really'. I mean, it isn't like we just met or something. We've been together for six years. It wasn't one of those "oh, I was in Vegas, met someone, and we got married" sort of things.

Allison the Awesome, as I sometimes call her (just now for the first time) had been offered a one night job in Las Vegas, and asked if I wanted to go out as well. I'd just gotten back from Vegas earlier that month, the second of my two trips a year I take for work. But I love Las Vegas and am always ready for another trip out there. I told her I'd love to go.

As the day got closer, I thought to myself "Wow, I should propose while I'm out there. That would be exciting." Over the years I'd had lots of different thoughts and plans about how I would propose, but none of them felt quite right. I thought about painting her name on a billboard, or taking her out to a fancy dinner, or making it happen on TV somehow, but none of these ideas were quite clicking. Earlier in the summer my buddy Jeremiah proposed to his girl, Michelle, by hanging a huge banner over a bridge during critical mass. Now THAT was rockstar, enough to get them in the papers and on TV. I wanted that type of excitement, but I didn't want the publicity of it. I wanted to find a way to get that amount of coolness, but in a private session.

Now, if you ever want to do something amazing, I would suggest Las Vegas. It's a great place to do exciting things, since it's already pretty exciting to begin with. You can piggy-back that perpetual Vegas-excitement, then amplify it with an additional act of exhilaration. I was feelin this. This would work. But now I had 2 weeks to find a ring.

Ring shopping was a bit tough. I don't know anything about rings. I mean, like nothing. I knew they had sizes, and that's about it. But this is a time of learning and growing up for ol' Billy-boy. Just like I had to learn about graphics cards to buy a computer, and had to learn about roaming charges to buy a cell phone, I had to learn about stone densities if I was going to buy a ring. I had to learn about styles, and setting, and the re-sizing process. And to make things more complicated I had to find out where each store got it's supplies from. Most were reluctant to say.

I took a class last spring, one which I sort of signed up for by accident. History of Southern Africa, at Columbia College. It was the best class I've ever taken. It changed my life, it really did. I could write an entire zine about the thoughts I thought that semester, and how I cried in nearly every class. We learned all about how Europeans swept down in the late 1800s and just decimated an entire continent. It was heart-breaking to read about, but so empowering also. It made me understand the world, and it made me want to travel and see it. It made me want to go to Africa, and I promise I will, some time soon.

My teacher, Prexy Nesbitt, was amazing. Hilarious, smart, and full of life experiences. He'd casually mention the times he was with Che Guevara, or tell us about the last time he met with Nelson Mandella. He taught us about a lot of things, including the horrible conditions under which diamonds are mined out of Africa. Little kids working all day, digging in the ground. He told us about Mozambique, and how they take the kids and cover their hands in Mercury, then send them to dig in the dirt and mud all day. The Mercury, which can absorb through the skin and will eventually poison a person, will also make it easier to pick out small flecks of gold, which are collected at the end of the day and sent over here to make rings. Ugh. Thanks world.

So why am I bringing up all this sadness during the happy awesome story of getting married? Because, it wasn't easy to pick out a ring! Life is never easy! All we want is to be happy, and then there's all these bullshit bad things around us! I just wanted to be in love and get married, but I had to do it in a way I felt comfortable with.

I went to a dozen different ring shops, and eventually found a pearl ring that I knew would be perfect. She loves pearls, and anything of the ocean. They boxed it up, and two days later we flew to Vegas.

I carried that ring in my pocket every where we went. I had no plan, but just knew I had to wait for the right moment. The first day we flew in, and we were tired. The second day was the day she had to work. But the third day, yeah... that would be the day. I decided. The third day of our 5-day trip.

"The day started off like any other. We woke up, got some coffee, then bought a time share. Then we headed over to the... Oh, wait. What was that? Oh, yeah, the timeshare. Yes, well, they were offering discount tickets to Cirque Du Soleil if we listened to a short speech on time shares.... Yes. Well, then we decided to go ahead and buy one."

I could write a whole zine about the timeshare thing. (If you've actually read this whole zine, you'll note that there are several subjects upon which I could write an entire zine.) I should. For my book, perhaps. I was absolutely against getting a timeshare, but I wanted those discount tickets. All I could think about was that episode of King of the Hill. "Don't be a Bill Dauterive." I kept telling myself, "You gotta be a Hank Hill". The sales people are good. They give you free cookies, for god's sake, and I'll buy anything if there is free sugar involved.

Timeshares are for people with lots of money to spend, those world-traveler types, right? But little by little we thought it over. Allison and I talked about our future together. "Don't we want to travel?" she asked me. Yes. "Don't you want to be with me forever and ever?" Yes. I had the ring in my pocket the whole time, and thought about proposing there at that timeshare place. I'm so glad I didn't.

At the end of the day it came down to this: timeshares are a lot of money, but it's an investment. An investment in a lifetime of travel. Some people buy houses, some people buy cars, and some people have massive lifelong drug problems! My point is, people spend money on all sorts of things. I never really have. But now I was ready. So was Allison; she moves forward without fear. So we signed those papers, and agreed to spend one week a year in Las Vegas for the rest of our lives. The deal also gave us special rates on flights, and two weeks a year to vacation in any other city around the world. I was excited. I've never been outside the US. I'm 29 years old, and just got my first passport this summer. It seems old when I say it, and I'm jealous of all my friends who have been all over. But at the same time, I've got many years ahead of me to get out there, and this whole timeshare business will totally encourage that type of life.

So yeah. The timeshare. That was a lot, by itself. A big day for us, a bonding experience. We weren't married, but we bought a timeshare together, so same diff. We went and got dinner, then went to see Zumanity, the awesome sexy Cirque show. Afterwards we took a walk down the strip. It was 2 in the morning, and the streets were buzzing with party-goers and drunken vacationers. Everyone was in a good mood. I was nervous as shit. I walked her down to the Bellagio, and found a little nook by the fountain. Allison is a Pieces, she is of the sea. She likes being near the water. Across the street was the fake Eiffel Tower, a wonderfully cheesy Vegas view. We talked about what an amazing and wonderful day we'd had so far, and she gave me a hug and a kiss.

**“Why is your heart beating so fast?”
she asked me.**


“Because I’m really nervous.”

**“Why?! Are you ok?
Is everything alright?”**

I got down on my knee and showed her the pearl ring. I’d been practicing all the things to say for years, but can’t remember if I said even a single one of them. But she got the idea. We laughed and cried and called my mom, the only person who knew my plans. It was 4 in the morning in Missouri, but she was elated to hear from us. It was pretty awesome.

We were engaged for one day, then said “Fuck it, we’re in Vegas, let’s just get married!” We used her iphone to google “Elvis wedding”. The guy told me they had 1:30, 2:00, or 3:00 available. It was a sweet little chapel called Viva Las Vegas, where they do theme weddings every half hour. (Their walls had pictures of Star Trek weddings, vampire weddings, Toga weddings...) But the Elvis is the most popular. There were different packages, so we went with the “Hound Dog Special”. Yes, we really ordered it up like that, “One Hound Dog Special, please” which got us some flowers, some pictures, a video, and one song from Elvis.

We hustled around. Allison found a beautiful white dress, and we hurried to the courthouse to get our papers filled out. Then over to the chapel. The ceremony was awesome! Elvis was totally cool, and very sweet. He sang “Can’t help fallin in love” and walked her down the aisle. The whole thing was 15 minutes. We caught our flight, and landed in Chicago a married couple. With a timeshare. How bout that?



www.youmethemeverybody.com

www.solvestickers.com

<http://www.leberjeweler.com/>

<http://wemakezines.ning.com/>

www.bodyartbyallison.com

